

УДК 29+2\_428+27-725+133.18

## Spiritual-Commercial Movement: Main Features, Peculiarities, Attribution

Olesya V. Kuznetsova\* and Alexey V. Osintsev  
Ural Federal University named after the B. N. Yeltsin  
51 Lenin, Ekaterinburg, 620083, Russia

Received 11.05.2014, received in revised form 18.06.2014, accepted 05.07.2014

*Spiritual-commercial movement is one of the most striking examples of the impact of the consumer society on the sphere of religion. Moreover, it is the influence of the consumption paradigm on the spiritual life of man. There is a problem of attribution of the spiritual-commercial movement as a religious phenomenon. In our view moving it away from the realm of the religious leads us away from understanding the spiritual foundations of this phenomenon. Several aspects of spiritual-commercial movement are considered in this article: its religious character, commitment to non-classical ethics, and connection with the consumption. The results of several studies of the spiritual-commercial movements of the Middle Urals are presented in this paper.*

**Keywords:** Study of religion, new religious movements, spiritual-commercial movement, consumption, esotericism, non-classical ethic.

Since the time in the early 90s of the XX century when the freedom of conscience and religion was proclaimed, our homeland was in a situation of “market of religions”, which is typical for the Western world. However, because of the rapid changes, it acquired a more radical form than there. In a short period of time the post-Soviet space was flooded with adherents and preachers of various religions and religious movements, which were either already known to the world or emerging for the first time on such a fertile and mellow soil. Stepanova E. A. describing “subjective turn” in the culture of modernity and postmodernity writes, which should be recognized as “that in the modern world we see signs of a radical change in the attitude of people to the traditional (or claiming to be established)

ideological and religious systems. This change does not reject tradition, but makes it a matter of personal conscious choice”. (Stepanova, 2011, p. 132). Traditional confessions, which certainly gained a lot of importance and a solid number of followers, had to coexist with other new religious movements (NRMs) of various kinds. It is significant that all of this was accompanied by a growing influence of the esoteric movements.

Addressing this issue, we often find that such esotericism has features which are different from the Late Antiquity, Middle Ages or Renaissance. Basically, many of the currently existing esoteric movements are related to the phenomenon of the New Age – a religion of “New Age” or “New Age” – the so-called “Age of Aquarius.” New Age movement emerged in the twentieth century

from the development, and, as paradoxical as it may seem, from the popularization of the occult currents of the XIX-XX centuries, such as theosophy and anthroposophy, spiritualism, mesmerism, “new thinking”, etc. One of the specific features of the occult, which distinguishes it as an esoteric movement is the desire to expose the secret knowledge (and the fact that it belongs to it). It is noteworthy that New Age esotericism is characterized by this same trait.

New Age phenomenon is very heterogeneous. The specific nature of the New Age movements is that at different degrees of expression of esoteric inclinations they are often characterized by a denial of their religious nature and a self-positioning in the form of social movements and practices of health, education, and even sport related character.

In this article, we intend to address ourselves to the field of modern esotericism, which takes refuge in the entities whose activity is associated with the eastern culture, in particular, such as “yoga” and “qigong” and we will also consider their religious side, in particular their religious-ethical side. In the Middle Urals, there are quite many centers and individual teachers in this field. In the city of Yekaterinburg in 2012 there were more than three dozen centers that offered yoga classes, either as their main activity, or within a wide range of workouts. It is interesting that more and more fitness centers include teaching yoga in the spectrum of the offer. However, we are more interested in centers specializing in Eastern practices and, in particular, yoga and qigong. Among the specialized or relatively specialized centers are: Iyengar Yoga Ural Center, Anahata Yoga Center, Banyan Yoga Center, Yogalaktika Center, Patanjali Yoga Studio, IndRa Yoga & Ayurveda SPA Center, Yoga and Life training center, Edis Ayurveda and Yoga Studio, Alexander Petrazhitsky Yoga Studio, Prana Studio, etc. Similarly, we see

quite a few various clubs and centers offering teaching qigong. What do these centers teach and what are the teachers there like? As far as yoga is concerned, the courses with such content are quite characteristic: Hatha Yoga, Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, Universal yoga, couples yoga, nidra yoga, yoga for the face, yoga for the eyes, Kundalini yoga, Taoist yoga, yoga for beginners, yoga for kids, yoga for pregnant women, intensive yoga, etc.

Why do we find it possible to refer these centers to the area of esoterics, not only to the area of health and sport? Although the practices in such centers are described primarily as physical, moreover as the physical activities to improve health, they have, in fact, to some extent, identifiable religious aspect of the esoteric nature. Instructors teach the students, though fragmentarily, in sporadic statements, the idea of human life energy typical of yoga, whose correct flow and distribution in the body promotes not only physical health, but also harmony with the universe. In this case, it is essential that the professed ideas have ethical (religious-ethical) character.

The esoteric image of these ideas can be judged on a number of parameters. First of all, knowledge is given by mentors as secret, available only to the initiated, which the students become as the teaching progresses. In turn, the knowledge is presented not as a whole open doctrine, but as gradually given information, as training is practiced, and has the form of the chain of revelations from the teacher to the students. In addition, although the initiation here does not have clearly built steps, the student is in the process of the “permanent initiation” (the process ends with the termination of training, due to the satisfaction with the level of knowledge, or the frustration due to the depletion of funds or just in case when the student feels he has the ability to be a teacher.)

Why, in its turn, do we not refer them to the traditional yoga and qigong, but to the New Age? We can see that there are at least five essential traits.

First of all, within one center, we find a set of movements that belong to the various schools. Instructors usually teach several different courses that are derived from various yoga teachings. Teaching qigong, just as with yoga, is often combined with a wide range of other practices, for example, with such movement as shou-dao.

Secondly, in the yoga and qigong centers known to us training is adapted to the conditions of modern urban life. Moreover, there are courses which are obviously innovative, such as a course for children or intensive courses as well as courses that refer to certain export knowledge of modern medicine. "Repertoire of practices, their rigidity or flexibility, accompanying narratives, their semantic content, their function within the religious life of the complex and the world in general – all these moves and is constant interpretation by the subjects of practice" (Aghajanian, Roussele, 2011, p. 11). One interesting consequence of the fact that qigong was also adapted by the New Age movement, is the case when qigong classes were held by skype, for example, in the "Shou Dao School of Tranquility" (Informational portal of International Federation of martial and health systems "shou dao" in Yekaterinburg, available at: <http://www.chigun-ekb.ru>).

Thirdly, the traditional foundations of yoga and qigong teachings are often loosely interwoven with individual mythologies of mentors who get their ideas in an entirely new culture. When the uninitiated appears as "biorobot" who automatically responds to external stimuli, and has "stereotypes in the worldview," whose life "could be lived in vain" (Informational portal of Banyan: yoga and personal training studio, available at: <http://banyan-yoga.ru/practice/coaches/10> ).

Fourth, it is essential that, with numerous references to the antiquity of the taught doctrines, the main ideological emphasis is undergoing a specific offset: comprehension of the mysteries of the world creation and initiation of cosmic harmony are reduced here to a set of pleasant feelings and elimination of negative emotions, such as "the enjoyment of life", "lightness in the body", "lightness in the head", "a feeling as though a burden has been shifted", "a feeling" of becoming a little more relaxed and free and more positive in the views on things and people ... " (Informational portal of Narayana Ashtanga Yoga center , available at: <http://www.omnarayana.ru>) and this is another specific feature of the New Age movement – here the esoteric doctrine is partly profaned.

Fifth, an important feature of the fact that such practices refer the New Age movement and not directly to the ancient traditions is that the age of the mentors here is often significantly younger than their students. Yoga and qigong teachers are often young people, just over 30. While many of their students are around 40 and over 40. This is combined with the typical New Age esotericism violation of a fundamental esoteric principle – the principle of transferring knowledge from the teacher to the student. In New Age esotericism, disciples want to quickly and widely spread the acquired knowledge.

Concluding the discussion of identification of the movements chosen by us, we must specify that they may fairly be attributed to the so-called "spiritual-commercial" movements. All of them, in one way or another, provide information and training related to the field of spiritual and they all operate on a commercial basis. The tuition fee is predetermined with respect to time and size and cannot be attributed to the donations. "A commercial coach, because of his work, is a preacher and a teacher, he gives his audience theory and practice (their ratio may be different,

it is possible that one of the elements can be reduced to a minimum)” (Egilsky, Matetskaya, Samygin, 2011, p.104). Spiritual-commercial movement is one of the most striking examples of the impact of consumer society on the area of religion; moreover, it is the example of influence of the consumption paradigm on the spiritual life of a person.

Besides yoga centers and studios, it is necessary to mention another phenomenon – yoga festivals and yoga tours. These phenomena are also not peculiar to ancient traditions of yoga teachings and are also a characteristic of the considered phenomena as the movement of the New Age. In particular, yoga tours to the “places of power” of the Urals, which followers believe Arkaim, the cave complex “Sikiyaz-Tamak” and others are. Tours are organized by these centers and by individual mentors.

So having described these movements, the authors see the necessity to elaborate on the latter, due to some specific features, which should be considered in details. For this work it is essential that the New Age Qigong, like yoga, undergoes a transformation, not only in the forms of transferring the knowledge, but in the content of this knowledge itself. In addition to the well-known traditional qigong, we can observe a widespread phenomenon that bears the same name, but is in fact very different from it. We should observe it in more detail, and not only due to the fact that it concerns us as one more of a number of New Age phenomena, but for the reason that it is one of the most striking forms of the specifics of this movement.

Instructors who teach this type of qigong claim that this is “special Taoist qigong” (above, we have encountered the name of the course – “Taoist Yoga”). As a consequence, it is completely different from the “regular” qigong. It is curious to see the desire to distance itself from the well-known movement through a kind of devaluation,

discrediting the latter (which we did not find in the case of different movements of yoga). Traditional qigong is being taught as “not natural” for the human body. For this reason, it is considered as “difficult to accomplish”, which means, in practice, “useless.” The principle of “Taoist qigong” is that one should not take balanced and straight body position, but rather those that maximize comfort. And it is this, according to the mentors, that helps achieve its “effectiveness.” Let us note that this is contrary to the principle of the well-known traditional oriental exercises, where the restoration of the “right” flow of “life energy” (“Qi” or “Ki”) begins with the correction of shifted vertebra, kyphosis and scoliosis.

Opposing itself to traditional qigong, this movement, however, strongly emphasizes that it is also based on ancient practices attributed by Taoists. Actually the image of alternative tradition is created, which allows to legitimize significant differences in the form of a little-known tradition, the expertise, finally making its way to the people.

At the same time, just as we have said above about yoga, the “Taoist qigong”, is permeated with obvious innovations. There are abundant courses such as “female Taoist practices.” Participants are offered “cell rejuvenation”, “restoring and maintaining hormonal balance”, “control of the endocrine system”, “ovarian breathing,” etc.

Among the reviewed ideas there is a movement which can be attributed to bioenergy. However, it does not refer to the work of W. Reich, as well as it directly refers to some secret knowledge of the East. This movement is very common in the Urals. Typical examples are “Amitayus” Indian and Tibetan Practices Center or “Tibet” Center. As can be seen from the proposed fee-based courses, the scope of work of such centers is very wide. They refer on the one hand to the organizations that specialize in yoga and qigong practices and on the other hand

to the field of spiritual teachings and thirdly to other magical and healing practices. (There is a specific feature of another kind: if yoga and qigong centers usually have a permanent address of its location, the latter considered category is often characterized by the lack of permanent address and is often reduced to sites on the Internet. This leads to interesting situations where the same person is the head of several centers.) This is often manifested in the “competence” of those who carry out their activities within these entities.

“Non-classical ethics differ from classical their language, way of explication which is not a category, and existential and existential concepts (Heidegger), as well as a distinctive style of argumentation. This is a system of morality, which is based on non-classical ideal of rationality and have an enormous persuasive influence over the moral and ethical values and ways of achieving them” (Viktoruk, Grigoriev, 2003, p. 28). It is crucial that the New Age movements discussed here have developed a number of ideas of religious and ethical character, if not quite homogeneous in terms of their interpretation, but concentrated around the same semantic centers developing in similar ways and characterized by common features.

First of all, we have to specify the contradictory religious and ethical world, preached by followers of the movements mentioned above. They are characterized by statements of such kind, as the universe is “very complex”, “incomprehensible”, but at the same time everything is “really simple”. All unimaginable complexity is due to the “energy” which sometimes flows in a steady stream, and sometimes it deviates from it, swirling.

The desire of esoteric teachers to show their fundamental expertise in scientific problems and riddles often takes very extravagant forms. For example, the explanation of an imaginary

problem of the end of the world on December 21, 2012 is taken seriously: the Earth will fly through the center of the galaxy and then everything will be fine again. However, the specifics of the main body of adherents of this considered movement is that they do not assess the absurdity of such statements, and continue to believe in the infallibility of the teaching. This situation is typical for the general phenomenon of religion and in its entirety reveals itself in the era of the scientific revolution. However, in our case, there is not a need for a firm faith. On the contrary, what is characteristic of the New Age movement as a whole, is that a person is rather free in a number of aspects of faith. The need for a comfortable feeling of knowledge and understanding of the world order and their place in it, easily accessible, despite the apparent complexity. In the first place, such need, apparently explains a noncritical acceptance of any provisions of the faith, often contradictory, mutually exclusive, and an unshakable belief in their truth.

In addition to the contradictions, logic and, therefore, religious ethics of an adept of the studied movements, is characterized by a distinctive inversion. Tendency to such inversion could be observed in the already mentioned thesis that the “unfathomable world” is “in fact really simple”. But we are interested in the “inversion” in the field of religious morality.

At the heart of the perception and understanding of the world by adherents lies the idea that the real world is plural and, therefore, “contradictory” in its manifestations. But in their case the “contradiction” between the real world and the world of the ideal, is shown through the cultivated tendency to simplify, not the dialectical synthesis. In other words, the conflict is removed not by synthesis, but by a change of the indicator. Thus, from the observation that in our life such things as love or emotional attachment can bring misfortune we can conclude that love is bad, it

is not real love, and that emotional attachments are evil.

The socially accepted moral is evaluated as well: if the actions have negative moral values consequences and then this is a bad moral. Similarly, the problem of the relation to God and to the divine is solved: if God is not only merciful, but also demands responsibility then God is not how he is depicted by the orthodox, he is bad, or reduced to a blur, bordering on non-existence.

In other words, we are dealing with a non-classical and situational ethics. For such movements it is very typical to concentrate on the development of one's "I", with one's desires, and to avoid thinking about the "other", especially in the aspect of "you". Another is represented either as a supporter and follower, or as oppressor of freedom of the spiritual person.

Such attempts of non-classical ethics commonly consider moral issues through the prism of "energy." It is a characteristic way of interpreting moral concepts, through rendered images, namely, through the image of the "energy flow." Thus, morality appears as a smooth, quiet flow of energy, while the deviations (moral corruption) appear as the flow turbulence. Based on this visualization, it is concluded that in order to attain a truly moral existence, it is necessary to straighten this flow in oneself. "Nonclassical ethics strongly suggest that ethics – not just theorizing, is primarily a system of practices, behavioral patterns, which can and should be changed in certain situations. Ethics, as noted, ...Aristotle – that is what makes us human. "Does" in this case means the formative, shapes, and forms, these are shown, fixed in the specific behavioral patterns, practice in general" (Viktoruk, Grigoriev, 2003, p. 28).

The ethics of gender relationships are very specific in our chosen field. It is, in fact, turned to the problems of sexuality: the development of "female power" and "sexual energy". These areas are considered necessary and sufficient for the traditional ways of "harmonization" of family relationships. Interestingly, with the postulation of commitment to tradition, an actual rejection of understanding of the values of the traditional family is frequently observed.

In all the movements we have a significant (though not unchallenged) idea of retribution used to identify them as religious. But the nature of the doctrine of retribution is very specific. It is based on the idea that the space and the universe have the ability to "respond" to our psycho-spiritual state. Thus, a person is reaping the fruits of their thoughts, desires and aspirations. In this regard, the necessity for a continuous spiritual development is postulated. In fact, the idea of spirituality is based on the discourse of the spiritual-commercial entities: a new spiritual era – "Age of Aquarius", spiritual growth or spiritual regeneration of mankind. With all this the practices have a predominantly body-psychological character and aimed primarily at listening and scrutinizing one's own body and senses. They allow to have some fantasy images in the mind, mostly visual and tactile: the contemplation of one's "inner flower," the contemplation of one's "totem animal", a plant growing out of the body, the sense of immersion in the earth, a sense of movement or concentration of heat in certain parts of the body, etc. The acquired spiritual qualities are reduced to the permanent positive emotional state, generosity and openness to the world, similar to the naiveté of a child.

## References

1. Stepanova E.A., "New spirituality and old religions", *Religious Studies*, 1 (2011), pp. 127 – 134. in Russian.

2. Aghajanian A., Roussele K. How and why to study contemporary religious practices?, Religious practice in modern Russia, 2006. pp. 10 – 32. in Russian.
3. Egilsky E.E., Matetskaya A.V. Samygin S.I. New religious movements. Modern non-traditional religions and esoteric teachings. Moscow, 2011. 224 p. in Russian.
4. Viktoruk E., Grigoriev A. "Theoretical aspects of non-classical ethics: NRM in the context of the existing legal provisions", Religion and Law, 2 (2011), pp. 28-29. in Russian.

## **Спиритуально-коммерческое движение: основные черты, особенности, атрибуция**

**О.В. Кузнецова, А.В. Осинцев**

*Уральский федеральный университет им. Б.Н. Ельцина  
Россия, 620083, Екатеринбург, пр. Ленина, 51*

---

*Спиритуально-коммерческое движение – один из ярчайших примеров влияния общества потребления на область религии, более того, влияния парадигмы потребления на духовную жизнь человека. Существует проблема атрибуции спиритуально-коммерческого движения как религиозного явления. На наш взгляд, выведение его за рамки религиозного уводит нас от понимания духовных основ этого феномена. Ряд аспектов спиритуально-коммерческого движения рассматривается в статье: его религиозный характер, приверженность неклассической этике, связь с парадигмой потребления. Результаты исследований ряда спиритуально-коммерческих движений Среднего Урала представлены в данной работе.*

*Ключевые слова: религиоведение, новые религиозные движения, спиритуально-коммерческое движение, потребление, эзотерика, неклассическая этика.*

---